



LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Office of Program Performance

FINAL PROGRAM QUALITY REPORT

FOR

Virginia Legal Aid Society

Recipient Number: 447061

December 15 – 18, 2008

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Virginia Legal Aid Society
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INTRODUCTION

Background on the visit. The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a program quality visit to Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS) from December 15 to December 18, 2008. The team members were Monica Holman Evans, OPP Program Counsel/team leader and Timothy Watson, OPP Program Counsel.

Program quality visits are designed to ensure that LSC grantees are providing the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment, the team carefully reviewed the documents LSC has received from the program including its renewal narrative for 2009, its case service reports (CSRs) and other service reports (OSRs), the numerous documents the program submitted in advance of the visit, including advocates' writing samples, and a survey of VLAS staff conducted on the Internet. On site, the team visited four of the program's five offices. In addition to speaking to most of the VLAS staff members, the team met with a sample of board members, judges and community organization members.

In performing its evaluation of the grantee's delivery system, OPP relies on the LSC Act and regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. Its evaluation is organized according to the four LSC Performance areas that cover needs assessment and priority setting; engagement of the low income community; legal work management and the legal work produced; and program management including board governance, leadership, strategic planning, resource development and coordination within the delivery system.

Program overview. VLAS is a non-profit law firm that was formed in 1977. VLAS provides a full range of legal services in Central Southside and Western Tidewater Virginia. The service area includes 20 rural counties and six small cities covering 10,200 square miles. The ethnicity of the service area is approximately 60% Caucasian and 40% African American. The client community has a growing Hispanic population ranging from 1% to 5% of some counties and cities in the 2000 Census. The area's employment largely encompasses agriculture, manufacturing and the service industry. Factory closings over the last ten years in Martinsville and Danville have taken thousands of jobs away from the service area. Unemployment in much of the service area is higher than the rest of the state.

VLAS provides civil legal services from a network of offices strategically located throughout the service area. The program's main location in Lynchburg, Virginia houses a field office along with the program's executive and administrative staff. The program's other field offices are located in Danville, Emporia, Farmville and Suffolk. The offices are geographically isolated from each other and are relatively small. The local offices are staffed by an average of 2.6 advocates and each serves over 125,000 people at 125% of the Federal Poverty Level. The program employs 13 attorneys, 8 paralegals and 10 other staff.

Summary of Findings. VLAS is a well managed, high quality legal services program that provides advice, counsel, brief service and extended representation to eligible clients within its service area. VLAS operates LawLine, an intake and advice hotline that provides legal advice and referrals to applicants during their first contact with the program. While LawLine has allowed VLAS to provide legal assistance to more clients, outreach efforts within the community have been somewhat compromised because the LawLine paralegals do not spend as much time out of the office. LawLine is used to identify systemic problems and create solutions for clients. VLAS places great emphasis on internal and external training opportunities for staff.

The majority of the program's funding is from sources other than LSC. VLAS has worked hard to diversify its funding base and financial assets to support program expansion and development. In March 2008 the Virginia General Assembly approved a civil filing fee increase. The additional revenue has allowed an increase in entry level salaries and the establishment of a statewide loan repayment and assistance program (LRAP) to support legal aid.

VLAS has an engaged and active board of directors. Board members receive an orientation and regular training. The board has a procedures manual and adopted a conflict of interest policy in 2007. As part of its governance and oversight, the board periodically reviews American Bar Association (ABA) Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid and the LSC Performance Criteria to identify those standards that VLAS does not meet and to recommend a response for meeting those standards. VLAS also uses the SWOT approach to ensure an effective delivery structure. The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) approach is a strategic planning method used to evaluate a project. The VLAS board looked at its objectives and identified internal and external factors related to achieving each objective.

PERFORMANCE AREA ONE. *Effectiveness in identifying the most pressing legal needs of low-income people in the service area and targeting resources to address those needs.*

Finding 1. VLAS conducts periodic needs assessments and responds to their findings.

VLAS engages in community legal needs assessments every five years. The last survey occurred in early 2006. The program widely distributed a written survey instrument and incorporated findings from legal needs assessment conducted by Legal Services Corporation of Virginia in 2005. Between assessments, VLAS responds to new legal needs identified in the press, state task force meetings and LawLine intake trends. The board's Program Development Committee analyzes results and uses the data as a basis for reviewing legal work priorities. Priorities are identified by subject matter and are ranked in order of priority. The board adopted internal guidelines to implement the priorities that are forwarded to VLAS field offices. The internal guidelines give staff guidance on interpreting priorities and deciding which cases should be forwarded to local field offices. Managing attorneys notify LawLine of cases the local office would and

would not like to accept. In cases that fall outside of the internal guidelines but still within the program priorities, LawLine paralegals may provide advice and follow up with relevant brochures and materials.

Finding 2. VLAS completed its strategic planning process in December 2007 with the board's adoption of a new strategic plan which will guide the program through 2012. The plan adopted tiered legal work priorities to allow offices more flexibility in responding to local needs.

VLAS analyzed the results from its critical legal needs process and reviewed LawLine data to determine its priorities. As a result of the program's planning process, legal work priorities were divided into two tiers. In the tiered priority system, tier one cases include public benefits, health care when the opposing party is a health care provider or insurance provider, and housing (public, subsidized, self-help evictions, conditions cases appropriate for rent escrow). Local offices always accept new LawLine and other transfers of tier one priority cases unless the office is closed for new cases. Offices are closed for new cases due to a number of variables including caseloads, court schedules and vacations. Case merit and managing attorney discretion will still determine whether the client receives advice or full representation.

Tier two cases include family, consumer, education, housing (private unsubsidized landlord-tenant, mortgage foreclosures), health care not involving a health or insurance provider, economic self-sufficiency and advance directives. Local offices may choose to accept or not accept transfers of tier two cases depending on local conditions including office caseload or emergencies. In addition to case type, VLAS staff also considers the internal guidelines, merits of the particular case, availability of other advocacy or assistance in the community, and the capacity of the program to provide services. The internal guidelines give staff guidance in implementing the priorities and deciding which tier two cases will be accepted by a local office.

The managing attorneys of local offices notify LawLine of the types of cases the offices are available to accept and not accept. A master table on the program's Exchange server informs everyone of local office guidance.

Finding 3. VLAS uses an outcome reporting system for all casework.

The outcome reporting system was created statewide about ten years ago. It allows VLAS to report on the process and impact for clients. Advocates are able to identify the results of a case based on a list of client-focused outcomes. VLAS staff provides case statistics to the board of directors on an annual basis. The board compares the number of cases and hours devoted to each type of priority to ensure the numbers and hours have a correlation to the priority's ranking. Also, managing attorneys assess the effectiveness of advocacy on an ongoing basis. Managing attorneys conduct a quarterly review of all open cases, review all pleadings for quality and review all closed case files.

PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. *Effectiveness in engaging and serving the low-income population throughout the service area.*

Criterion One. Dignity and sensitivity.

Finding 4. The program's interactions with its clients ensure dignity and sensitivity.

The program's interactions with its clients show respectful and courteous treatment by staff. Each client receives a client satisfaction survey and the results are shared with staff. Survey results support positive interactions with clients. Staff members receive cultural diversity training and training on interacting with clients. Supervisors are available to assist staff with unusual or challenging client situations.

VLAS seeks to maximize access to its services for the low-income community by locating offices on bus lines when they exist and offering toll-free telephone intake and advice 6.5 hours a day, four days per week. All offices are handicapped-accessible and have areas to ensure private client interviews. Three of the program's five offices are in their original locations.

Finding 5. VLAS is committed to improving office space for client service.

VLAS has made efforts to improve work environments and maximize client service. The program is committed to acquiring ownership of offices through the help of capital campaigns. VLAS was able to purchase its Suffolk office in 2007. To date, over 80% of the total project costs have been raised. The program now owns the Emporia, Lynchburg and Suffolk offices.

VLAS is seeking improved office space for its Danville location. That service office has experienced problems with maintenance, Internet, plumbing, heat, elevators and increasing rent. The office needs more space to accommodate program expansion and additional staff.

Recommendation:

II.5.1¹. The program should continue to explore funding options for the Danville office and expedite plans to identify a new facility.

Finding 6. The program's intake structure is well-staffed and responsive to the needs of the client community.

VLAS launched its LawLine intake and advice system in May 2005 and continues to improve its effectiveness. LawLine operates from 9:00 am – 3:30 pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays are reserved for meetings, training and

¹ Recommendations are numbered as follows: the Roman numeral references the Performance Area followed by the finding number and lastly by the recommendation number that pertains to the finding.

catch-up. LawLine makes use of question and answer scripts that are integrated into Kemps Case Works for easy access. LawLine is staffed by six paralegals, one supervising attorney and one managing attorney. The managing attorney and two paralegals are located in Lynchburg, a supervising attorney and two paralegals are located in Farmville, and two paralegals are located in Danville. Intake materials and brochures are constantly reviewed and updated by staff.

Legal advice, referrals to other providers or scheduling of an interview with a local office are services provided to eligible callers. Every client is able to receive some assistance even if it is only information through brochures. Callers needing extended service are referred to a local VLAS office. Information is saved and instantly available to the local office through the Kemps Case Works case management system. Intake paralegals routinely screen for trends and try to identify additional legal problems a client may be facing. VLAS makes after-hours appointments and conducts visits to clients upon request.

Criterion Two. Engagement with and utilization by the low-income population.

Finding 7. A goal of the VLAS 2008-2012 Strategic Plan is to improve engagement with the client community.

VLAS is engaged with the client community. The program has outreach efforts and distributes brochures and flyers to the low-income population. VLAS sends a Spanish-speaking paralegal into the community one day per week to reach out to the Hispanic population in Lynchburg. In 2009, she plans to extend outreach to the rest of the service area. Since the implementation of LawLine, paralegals do not get out into the community as much as they did in the past. However, LawLine does allow the program to identify and address needs of isolated segments of the service area.

Criterion Three. Access and utilization by the low income population.

Finding 8. VLAS has the capacity to appropriately serve clients in the service area including those with limited-English proficiency (LEP).

Community members noted that VLAS is accessible to clients within the service area. The program adopted its current LEP policy in 2006. The policy mirrors the program's commitment to deliver high-quality legal services to its clients regardless of language, cultural background, national origin, or hearing or visual impairments. LawLine uses Language Line to ensure language accessibility to all callers. The Virginia Relay System and Instant Messaging ensure that the program is accessible to the hearing and speech disabled.

PERFORMANCE AREA THREE. *Effectiveness of legal representation and other program activities intended to benefit the low income population in its service area.*

Criterion One. Legal Representation.

Finding 9: VLAS has sufficient capacity and resources to effectively represent clients.

VLAS represents clients with a corps of 13 attorneys and 8 paralegals. There are six managing attorneys, one supervising attorney, two senior attorneys, and four staff attorneys. Of these advocates, LawLine makes use of a managing attorney, a supervising attorney, and six paralegals. VLAS advocates reported 4,492 closed cases in 2007, primarily in the subject areas of family (40.2%), housing (20.9%), income maintenance (14.2%), and consumer (13%). The program closed 486 cases per 10,000 poor persons, far above the national median of 253 for that period. VLAS closed 78 extended cases per 10,000 poor persons, again above the national median of 56. Of the total cases closed, 12.5% were closed under the categories of settlements with and without litigation, agency decisions, and court decisions. Case closure figures from January 1, 2008 through October 28, 2008 indicated that the total number of cases for 2008 would exceed the figure for 2007. During the aforesaid 10-month period, VLAS closed 4,488 cases.

The program has a good mix of young and seasoned attorneys. Several attorneys have many years of experience. Writing samples and interviews revealed that the program has a solid core of institutional knowledge, procedural skill, and litigation experience. VLAS has conducted an analysis of attorneys per office to make certain that clients have relative equity of access throughout the service area. Based on the client population per local jurisdiction, the Emporia office is justified in only having one attorney until the program receives additional funding.

VLAS devotes more than sufficient resources to staff training. It has a training budget of \$39,500. Two attorneys recently went to the National Consumer Law Center training conference and attorneys attended other national events such as those offered by the National Aging and Law Conference and the National Organization of Social Security Claimant's Representatives. Substantive law trainings are offered several times per year by the Virginia Poverty Law Center. VLAS attorneys and advocates are often asked to make presentations on advocacy issues at these events and participate in statewide "creative advocacy" task forces created in 2007.

Advocates have access to on-line research through a statewide contract with Lexis, and to extensive substantive law resources and pleadings available at a statewide advocates' website, www.probono.net/VA.

VLAS advocates generally reported that the program supports their legal work. Some staff said more secretarial support would be helpful. Others suggested that the program could use more money for experts. There is a litigation fund (\$6,500) and attorneys have used it – e.g., hiring a surveyor on a property case. Managing attorneys are asked for their input about anticipated litigation expenses when the annual budget is being developed. While VLAS has always provided litigation support as needed, expert witness fees and deposition costs were recently added to the budget in response to a request from an office that is handling a complex consumer issue.

Finding 10: VLAS employs effective systems, approaches, and techniques to maximize the efforts of program advocates, but can improve its effectiveness with regular evaluations and with completion of its process to create practice standards for advocates.

VLAS has adopted a well thought-out strategic approach to maximizing program effectiveness. In March 2007, the program executive director participated in a planning process to create a statewide advocacy conference. The October 2007 conference resulted in the creation of ten “creative advocacy” task forces. Three of the ten task forces focus directly on consumer law issues. As consumer issues become more frequent, they may be elevated in the program’s tiered priority system. VLAS’s highly networked staff has implemented a plan to complement this approach. All staff is conscious of the need to increase knowledge on foreclosure issues. Staff use statewide email lists to watch for certain cases. Managing and senior attorneys discuss issue development in meetings with the executive director. They then talk with staff attorneys about what types of cases to look for. LawLine is proving useful for spotting trends and identifying fact patterns. For example, clients calling about a garnishment are asked if they have a loan from a pay-day lending business.

In addition to the systemic approach related to the statewide strategy, VLAS employs a similar approach in its day-to-day advocacy. Weekly staff meetings are held to assess new cases. Quarterly case reviews are held in each office. Advocates participate in monthly case strategy meetings and bi-monthly advocacy conference calls. Managing attorneys and supervisors use the case management system to monitor case loads and case turnover, and they are aware of the number of open files that are being handled by their advocates. Caseloads run from the mid-20’s to the mid-50’s, depending upon level of experience and case complexity. The case management system has a pre-set query for checking for dormant cases.

The program employs a joint calendar in Microsoft Outlook for calendaring and tickling deadlines and appearances. Clients receive satisfaction surveys (with business reply postage) at case closure. Program file management policy, which is available to all personnel on the intranet, requires that managers review each case at closure.

VLAS encourages excellence in its advocacy staff by using an incentive program for advocates to reach senior attorney status. This can be reached in as little as two years if the attorney meets certain criteria relating to complexity of cases or completion of a special project. For example, one staff attorney has set up a Hot Docs document management system as part of this incentive system. Reaching senior attorney status can result in a pay increase of \$5,000 a year or more.

Although the program does not have a litigation manual, it appointed a team of three managing attorneys to create draft practice standards which will substantively have the same effect as a litigation manual. It expects to adopt the standards in December 2009.

Although there is a written evaluation protocol, it appears to have been employed spottily by the program. Some managing attorneys indicate that they have not been evaluated in several years.

Recommendations:

III.10.1 LSC encourages VLAS to proceed with creating and adopting practice standards for program advocates. These practice standards will supplement the supervisory requirements that are currently contained in job descriptions.

III.10.2: LSC encourages VLAS to apply its policy of staff performance evaluations uniformly and regularly throughout the program.

Finding 11: Given limited resources, VLAS achieves good results for service area clients.

VLAS has a good reputation for obtaining rapid and effective decisions for clients in extended cases. This was noted by judges and other persons outside of the program. Staff members attribute this ability to the existence of the LawLine intake system, which reportedly weeds out a high number of cases that might otherwise prevent advocates from fully concentrating on more urgent matters.

Attorneys and paralegals also take pride in significant issues they have handled or are litigating that have – or are expected to create – lasting benefits for area clients. These matters include litigation on a foreclosure rescue scam, a payday lending case in circuit court, and success in persuading state personnel to use correct formulae for benefits calculations. Other examples include the development of a theory on refinancing in a pay-day lending case that has been employed by other lawyers across the state, and the filing of a minimum wage claim under the Fair Labor Standards Act on behalf of underpaid restaurant workers.

Judges and other equal justice stakeholders were uniformly complimentary of the program's effectiveness and commitment. One judge indicated that he wished that more private bar lawyers were as committed as the VLAS advocates to high quality representation. Some judges expressed the hope that program advocates might appear in their courts on significant consumer issues, such as predatory lending cases or those collection cases in which bad debt has been purchased by a new company.

Criterion Two. Private Attorney Involvement.

Finding 12: VLAS benefits from a well-executed Private Attorney Involvement Plan (PAI).

The program uses a pro bono delivery model to meet its PAI obligation. It has a 2008-2009 Private Attorney Involvement Plan that outlines the history, delivery and accounting requirements of PAI in the service area. The PAI coordinator, with assistance from chief

secretaries and managing attorneys, administers the component. VLAS asks for attorneys to take a case or make a two-hour equivalent contribution to the program. The private bar component includes approximately 150 attorneys that have agreed to provide representation to VLAS clients. Approximately 80 attorneys take at least one case each year. Private attorneys also provide co-counsel assistance on significant cases (primarily consumer cases) as part of the program's PAI effort.

The program closed 121 cases through its private bar component in 2007. From July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008, 109 cases were closed according to the annual report. Almost all PAI cases are in the family (57%) and other (39.7%) categories. The latter category encompasses many routine matters such as powers of attorney, guardianships, bankruptcy, and wills. Court decisions accounted for 56.2% of these cases, and brief service accounted for 40.5%. In the past year, 34% of PAI referrals were made outside of the Lynchburg area.

Private attorneys are recognized with awards and their names are published on a full page in the VLAS annual report. A judge indicated in an interview that VLAS enjoys good relations with the bar as a result of its private bar involvement activities.

The PAI coordinator reports that cases are continually tracked and that all referrals are followed, mainly through the use of email, for timeliness and quality.

As part of a national initiative led by LSC, in June of 2008 the VLAS board passed a resolution to emphasize the importance of PAI activities in assisting clients who cannot be served by staff attorneys due to limited resources.

Criteria Three and Four. Other Program Services and Activities on Behalf of Clients.

Finding 13: VLAS conducts a large variety of successful outreach, community education, and other activities on behalf of its clients, but should make certain that these efforts are uniformly applied across the service area to the extent possible.

VLAS provides pamphlets and brochures on topics most relevant to the poverty population. The program's phone system offers scripts on poverty law subjects 24 hours a day. Clients can get similar information on the program's website, www.vlas.org, and on the statewide client website, www.valegalaid.org. Outreach is conducted via newspaper articles and by presentations to community groups, senior nutrition sites, tenant organizations and service clubs by attorneys and paralegals. VLAS reached approximately 20,000 people in 2007 with pamphlets, brochures, and presentations.

VLAS has developed several specialized projects that target problems experienced by the client community. These projects represent a significant pay-off in the program's long-running investment of time and energy with other service agencies that have an interest in the plight of the poverty population.

- Financial Freedom is a financial budgeting and consumer awareness project in Lynchburg and Emporia; VLAS hopes to expand the program to other parts of the service area.
- The Housing Improvement Project funded by United Way provides advice and representation in evictions, foreclosures, correction of hazardous conditions, and renovation or construction of affordable housing.
- A project called Strengthening Families with Children increases access to health care, education and financial resources while increasing family stability.
- In conjunction with agencies on aging and senior organizations, VLAS has created the Senior Citizens Legal Assistance Project to provide advice and representation to senior citizens in social or economic need.
- VLAS operates the Health, Education, Advocacy Law Project (HEAL), a medical-legal partnership.
- Building Economic Success Together (BEST) is a cooperative effort designed to improve the economic well being of low-income workers in the Danville area by increasing the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Program staff members sit on boards of community and client organizations, and assist state agencies with local initiatives. A state agency local office gave the program high marks for visibility, effectiveness, commitment, and involvement with their communities.

Although the above efforts are indicative of a high level of community education activity generally, program staff would like to see increased outreach and community education efforts in the Lynchburg area.

PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. *Effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.*

Criterion One. Board Governance.

Finding 14: The program's governing body fulfills its oversight responsibilities.

The current by-laws of the board were amended and approved by the board of directors in 2006. The VLAS board has 15 positions with four vacancies. Two of the vacancies are for client-eligible board members. The board meets four times per year; two meetings by conference call. The board's structure includes officers, an Executive Committee and four standing committees. The four standing committees are Budget & Personnel, Governance, Resource Development and Program Development. The board adopted a conflict of interest policy in 2007. The board does not have term limits.

Budget oversight is a shared responsibility between the deputy director, the executive director and the Budget and Personnel Committee of the board. The Budget and Personnel Committee of the board is actively engaged in the program's financial operations. The committee oversees the annual budget process and reviews the annual audit. The deputy director, in consultation with the executive director, drafts the annual budget that is approved by the Committee for recommendation to the full board. The

budget process considers the strategic plan, the current budget, staff input, revenue projections and board initiatives. The deputy director also prepares a quarterly budget variance report for the Committee.

New board members receive program orientation and training and are given a procedures manual. Board members attend the program's annual retreat. The board of directors has not recently conducted a performance evaluation of the executive director.

Recommendations:

IV.14.1. The board should consider setting term limits.

IV.14.2. Instead of providing quarterly reports, VLAS should consider producing monthly budget variance reports for the Budget and Personnel Committee.

IV.14.3 The board should conduct regular performance evaluations of the executive director.

Finding 15. The board of directors is actively engaged in the program's work.

Board members, including client-eligible members, are actively involved in decision-making activities. The board records contain a file of Action Approval Memoranda. The Memoranda reflect all actions taken by the board and are filed according to year. The Memoranda include background information and attachments to provide a complete record of decisions approved by the board.

Annually, the board compares the number of cases and hours devoted to each type of legal work priority to the adopted ranking of legal work priorities. This ensures that the number of closed cases and hours expended accurately reflect the subject area's ranking. In addition to a review of priorities, the board is actively involved in reviewing policies, strategic planning and identifying critical issues facing VLAS. The board establishes appropriate goals, objectives and strategies to address issues. The board is engaged in all levels of review regarding the program's delivery structure and methods.

Criterion Two. Leadership.

Finding 16. VLAS demonstrates a commitment to strong leadership.

VLAS is managed and led by an executive director, deputy director, director of development and managing attorneys who are highly qualified, experienced and respected. Interviews with program staff, community members and the judiciary indicated that the program enjoys strong leadership. The executive director is well regarded and chairs the Virginia Project Directors Association and the Virginia Legal Aid State Planning Assembly.

Finding 17. Opportunities are available for leadership development, but VLAS does not have a succession plan.

As mentioned earlier, VLAS has adopted criteria for promotion from a staff attorney to a senior attorney. Once the criteria are met, the executive director must approve the promotion. The criteria may also be applied to hire an applicant as a senior attorney. VLAS has no succession or transition plan in place.

Recommendation:

IV.17.1. VLAS should consider the development of a succession plan to ensure continuity of operations.

Criterion Three. Overall management and administration.

Finding 18. VLAS has good management and administration but does not engage in regular program evaluations.

VLAS has a Personnel Policies Manual, Intake Screening Procedures and a CLE Manual. The program's intranet contains policies and manuals related to training, program orientation, the case management system, legal work priorities and overall administration.

The management team covers financial management, human resources, and technology. The executive director supervises the work of the managing attorneys. Significant responsibility is delegated to the local offices regarding management and office operations.

Even though there is no evidence of non-compliance with funder requirements, VLAS does not engage in its own periodic evaluation of management operations. The board does engage in a process to review the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (the SWOT approach). VLAS produced its first annual report in 2008. The annual report is a comprehensive document that can be used in the program's fundraising efforts.

The VLAS 2008-2012 Strategic Plan provides for development of a plan to continue client services in the event of a disaster or emergency affecting the client community. While it has been discussed, significant progress has not been made in this area. The program hopes to have a completed plan in place by March 2009.

Recommendations:

IV.18.1 VLAS should continue to achieve objectives set out in the strategic plan including the development of a disaster plan and evaluation of management operations.

Criterion Four. Financial administration.

Finding 19. VLAS appears to have experienced financial staff responsible for managing the program's fiscal operations.

The team's review of the program's financial administration was limited. The deputy director, a certified public accountant, serves as the chief financial officer. She prepares the worksheets related to the audit and reviews the final audit report. She also prepares the monthly financial statements. The systems manager prepares the monthly financial reports and manages the computer systems. A part-time financial assistant codes and inputs all bills and prints checks. The program's books are closed every month by the systems manager and reviewed by the deputy director. Annual budget planning is done with board involvement and includes a three-year forecast. VLAS's fiscal management is guided by a Financial Procedures Manual.

Criterion Five. Human resources administration.

Finding 20. VLAS maintains effective human resources administration.

The program's human resources function is managed by the deputy director with assistance from the executive director and systems manager. The board's Budget & Personnel Committee is also engaged in personnel matters. VLAS conducts a routine salary scale analysis for all positions. An increase in the statewide civil filing fee made it possible for the program to increase attorney salaries and increase the entry salary for new attorneys to \$48,000. The new entry salary has improved the number of experienced attorneys applying for employment with VLAS.

Virginia has also established a statewide Loan Repayment Assistance Project (LRAP) to assist attorneys with educational debt. Attorneys are eligible for \$5,000 in assistance the first year. All Virginia legal aid programs have also committed to contributing 6% of salary to retirement for all employees beginning with the 2008/09 fiscal year.

Morale within VLAS is good. The program does not have high staff turnover. Several staff members have been with the program over 20 years. These staff members have worked in different positions and received promotions over the years.

Criterion Six. Internal communication.

Finding 21. The management team effectively communicates with staff.

Regular communication among staff takes place through email and within the LawLine Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system. VLAS maintains an intranet that has regularly updated policies and procedures. The administrative staff meets weekly to review pending and new administrative projects. The senior staff meets every two months by conference call to discuss and resolve program-wide issues. The executive director visits local offices as needed. VLAS also conducts an annual retreat for staff and board members.

Criterion Seven. General resource development and maintenance.

Finding 22. Since hiring a director of development, VLAS has seen increased success in resource development.

The director of development has been with VLAS for eight years. Since her arrival at the program, every funding source (other than LSC) has at least doubled. LSC funding represents approximately 30% of the program's total budget. The director of development credits fundraising success to an open and supportive executive director. VLAS receives the majority of its non-LSC revenue from state appropriations and IOLTA funds. The program also receives agency and local government grants, grants for special projects and individual donations. Even though the board has a Resource Development Committee, board engagement in resource development could be strengthened. Individual board members have not been very active with making personal solicitations.

Recommendation:

IV.22.1 VLAS should further engage its board of directors in resource development efforts. Board training on fundraising should be helpful with this endeavor.

Criteria Eight and Nine. Coherent and comprehensive delivery structure/Participation in an integrated legal services delivery system.

Finding 23. VLAS is engaged in comprehensive and integrated service delivery.

VLAS collaborates with other agencies that provide assistance to the low-income population of Virginia. Specifically, the program works with the Virginia State Bar, Virginia Bar Association and the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association. VLAS also collaborates with local community groups and agencies. VLAS accepts referrals from agencies and makes referrals as necessary.

VLAS manages the statewide TIG grant and participates in statewide task forces. The program has representatives on most of the ten statewide task forces that address systemic problems that affect the low income population. Staff members have also participated as board members, officers and volunteer leaders with various organizations across the state.